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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000233

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEC](#) [HA](#)  
SUBJECT: HAITI: FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF ARISTIDE'S DEPARTURE  
SEES SMALL DEMONSTRATION

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 122  
[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 177  
[1](#)C. PORT AU PRINCE 202  
[1](#)D. PORT AU PRINCE 228

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Thomas C. Tighe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The fifth anniversary of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's departure from Haiti passed with minimal comment and one small demonstration. Several hundred Fanmi Lavalas activists marched on February 28 to protest the exclusion of their party from the April Senate elections, to renounce cooperation with President Preval and his Lespwa coalition, and to demand Aristide's return to Haiti. Haitian police and UN peacekeepers prevented the protestors from approaching the offices of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). The small demonstration may signal that Lavalas leaders will be unable to mobilize broad-based resistance to the CEP's rejection of Lavalas candidates before the elections in April. Only one political party outside Lavalas commented on the anniversary, arguing that Aristide's removal from power in 2004 was not a coup d'etat as claimed by his followers but the result of the Haitian people's loss of confidence in him. End summary.

SMALL PROTEST, HARSH RHETORIC  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Hundreds of Fanmi Lavalas (FL) supporters heeded the call of activists Rene Civil, Ansito Felix, and other leaders of Lavalas grassroots organizations to protest February 28 the exclusion of FL candidates (ref A) from the upcoming senatorial elections and to mark the anniversary of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's departure in 2004. No significant acts of violence were reported as protesters numbering in the hundreds wound through several neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince from the ruins of the Saint Jean Bosco church -- where Aristide was once a priest and from where he launched his political career -- to the headquarters of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). A significant Haitian National Police (HNP) and MINUSTAH cordon around the CEP building -- which had been withdrawn immediately after Carnival, only to be reestablished in anticipation of the protests -- kept the demonstrators at a distance from the CEP building. MINUSTAH officials, who estimated that the crowds numbered less than 1,500 protestors, told DATT that UN peacekeepers had been conducting more patrols and increased monitoring of the security situation since mid-February in

response to Lavalas leaders' threats of additional protests. A local RSO employee monitoring the event estimated the number of marchers at less than 500.

13. (SBU) The protest saw sharp rhetoric against President Rene Preval, whom FL leaders accuse of betraying Aristide and the Lavalas cause. Marchers chanted slogans mirroring Rene Civil's remarks at a February 26 press conference announcing the protest, at which he blamed Preval for the CEP's decision to exclude Lavalas candidates from the April elections and demanded that the entire CEP resign. Civil, surrounded by FL Mobilization Committee members Ansito Felix, Maitre Fritznel, and Belford Claude, said that Lavalas's alliance with Preval's Lespwa coalition had definitively ended. He added that Lavalas wanted to participate in fair and democratic elections. Civil also branded as 'traitors' Lavalas dissidents Yvon Neptune and Yves Cristalin, who had recently taken their battle against Civil and the FL Executive Board public by supporting alternative Lavalas candidates for five of the twelve available Senate seats.

#### MUTED POLITICAL REACTION

14. (SBU) Political reaction to the protests and the anniversary of Aristide's departure was limited. While Lavalas rhetoric against President Preval has intensified, its "divorce" with his Lespwa coalition is no longer news. Alyans leader Evans Paul tried to puncture the Lavalas legend surrounding the end of Aristide's presidency by arguing that his term ended not with a coup d'etat but rather with the

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voluntary departure of the President after the Haitian people lost all confidence in him.

#### COMMENT

15. (C) The low turnout on February 28 suggests that it will not be easy for FL to carry out its promised mass mobilization to protest their exclusion from the Senate elections (refs B and C). FL organizers may lack the resources to mount a sustained series of protests. After the party's February 16 statement condemning the government's handling of the election as a continuation of the 'coup d'etat' they say removed Aristide from power (ref B), there may be lingering confusion within Lavalas rank and file over whether the party and Aristide himself support elections at all. Lavalas activists may be biding their time to prepare a greater display of strength. FL moderates have disappeared almost entirely from view, although former Prime Minister Yvon Neptune gave a spirited interview to a U.S. newspaper and former Deputy Yves Cristalin was recently sworn in as a member of President Preval's commission on the constitution (ref D). The Haitian police and UN peacekeepers are prepared for potential disturbances, but Lavalas organizers have not yet shown whether they can muster much grassroots support.

TIGHE